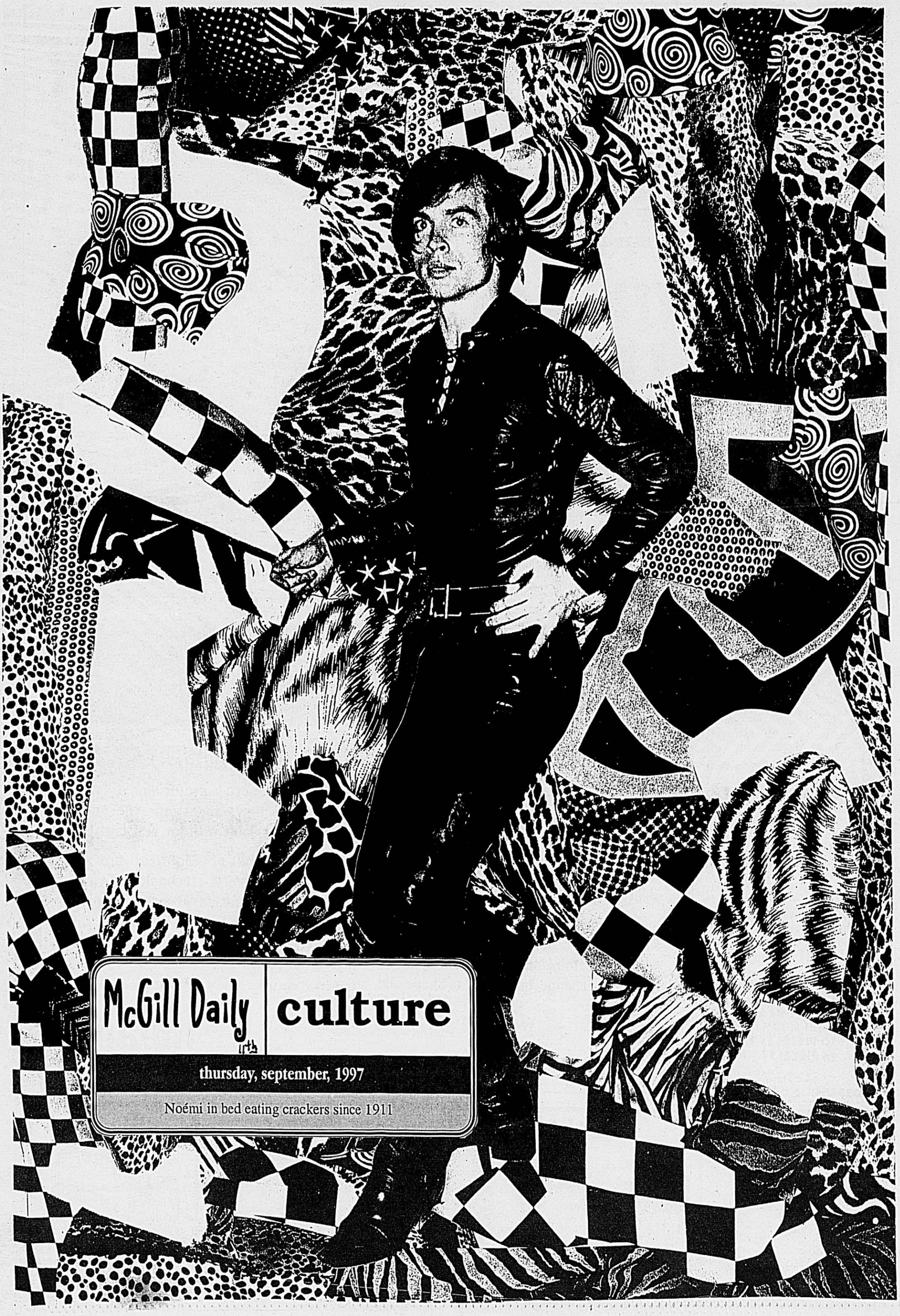

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culture

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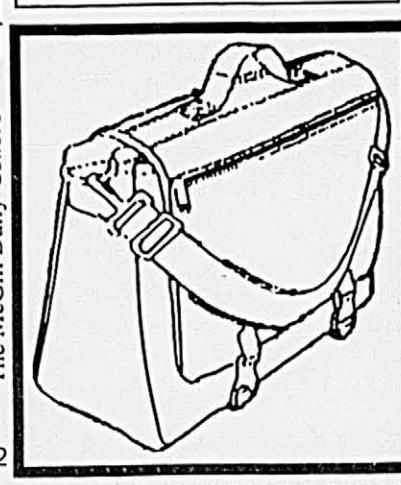

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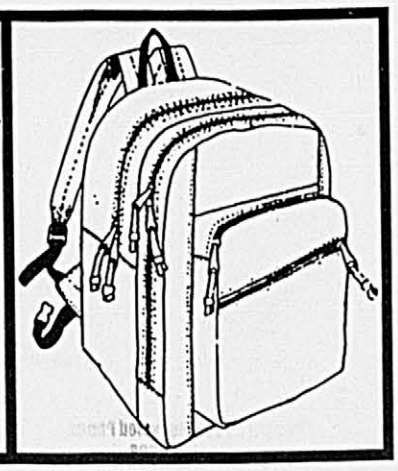

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These Fishes Don't Swim

Finn Taylor's debut feature loses its mind...or whatever...

by Alex Halperin

Road trip movies are so much fun. We all love watching a character pull over at three in the morning for coffee and cigarettes so they can spend all night whizzing towards some lofty or worthless goal. So it's a surprise that in Dream with the Fishes, Finn Taylor's directorial debut, three fresh actors cannot maintain the excitement and uniqueness of their adventure despite an audience pining to believe them.

The movie begins with its strongest sequence as Terry (played with quiet efficiency by David Arquette), a nerdy voyeur, contemplates jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge bridge. Much to his chagrin, Nick, a typical bad-ass (Brad Hunt) approaches Terry and asks for his watch, pointing out that, since he is about to commit suicide: "well...you don't need it."

After promising Terry a less painful death in the form of sleeping pills, Nick coaxes Terry off the ledge and the two venture off to meet Nick's affected bohemian girlfriend Liz (Kathryn Erbe). Predictably, Nick and Terry don't become friends immediately, which leads to their fighting like three year-olds for a bit. Then, on cue, they grudgingly befriend each other. Unfortunately, this new flower won't have time to bloom as a crude plot twist reveals Nick will die within weeks of a terminal illness.

Their friendship is based on living out Nick's fantasies before the inevitable and the scenes in which they do so are enchanting. Terry, who is in fact very much obsessed with his deceased wife, shares Nick's feeling that life has mistreated him and quickly, if reluctantly, adjusts to Nick's joie de vivre. Here Taylor's directing is effective, as he disregards societal boundaries by freeing Nick and Terry from law and conformity. And we sit back and watch the fun. They bowl in the buff with a couple of hookers, take LSD at a boardwalk carnival and wear undershirts to a fancy restaurant. We vicariously watch Nick and Terry as they oh so self-consciously live life to the fullest. They are naive, nineties quasi-hipsters and we are just happy to be along for the ride.

The movie falters when it tries to do more than depict the amateurish self indulgences of these characters. Taylor desperately wants to make a film of social relevance or consequence out of this bizarre flick and the actors seem unprepared to adjust to the director's new aspiration. Fleeing police after a clichéd, post Pulp Fiction esque bumbled crime scene, the pair return to Nick's hometown to confront the parents who estranged him years ago, an old girlfriend, an ex-showgirl aunt, a potential marriage to Liz (who shows up out of the blue) and...well the list goes on. Attempting to juggle all these issues plus Terry's continuing voyeurism, Nick's imminent death and a rambling, chintzy symbolism surrounding water and fishes-all important movies have symbolism, right?-is impossibly ambitious for the movie's skimpy premise.

There are simply too many subplots which come into play for any of them to carry emotional weight. Taylor skips between so many heady issues that any potential depth gets lost in the fray. With a script in such disarray nothing can be done to give the film cohesiveness or entertainment value. This is not to say that there aren't strong scenes: Nick's confrontation with his belligerent father and his fixing the lottery are strong alone but fail to elevate the remaining mish-mash.

More representative of the film's dramatic nature is a silly monologue by Nick's friend about finding God in his bathtub. It's as if the key grip had a similar experience and begged Taylor to write it into the screenplay. Taylor's attempt at bringing our emotional attachment to seven or eight characters in the concluding half hour is absurd and just becomes boring as we skip rapidly from one epiphany to the next.

Dream with the Fishes ends far too late before an antsy audience, satisfied (and sufficiently jolted) by the conclusion but bored and lost by the tedium of the previous scenes. The film fails to recognize that it was more visionary during the unpretentious beginning. Hence, it strives for a serious context in which to house a plot that comes across as trivial. The lasting impression of Dream (if any) is a road trip movie gone awry; it foolishly sacrifices the freedom and decadence of reckless youth for a failed attempt at artistic and moral significance.

Dream with the Fishes *is playing at the Cinéma du Parc until September 25.*

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Recruitment Meeting

It doesn't matter whether you've filled out a recruitment form yet, or even if you are capable of cohesive linear thought. If you have two feet and a heart beat come to the Recruitment Meeting. All butchers, bakers or candlestick makers with questions about getting involved in the McGill Daily are invited to learn more about, or savagely criticize, our splendid little institution.

McGill Daily Recruitment Meeting

Tuesday September 16, 17h00
Thompson House
3650 McTavish
Top Floor, in the Blue Room

Board of Directors Meeting

Friday September 12, 1997
16h30
Shatner Building
Room B-10

Daily Staff Meeting

Every Thursday
17h30 (that's five thirty to you, mister)
Room B-03

Emerging Program offers a look at the City's Art Scene

Discover Montréal Culture

by Patrick Levesque

Culture... What does this word mean to you? If, like many, you believe its significance and implications are restricted to the understanding of elitist intellectuals, then maybe it is time to freshen up your point of view. And that's exactly the opinion of Ari A. Cohen, director of the Youth Institute, a new division of the Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts, and founder of *Rendez-vous with the World of Art.*

This annual event is designed to expose young adults living in Montréal to the city's cultural scene. "Art can be intimidating sometimes," says Cohen. "There is, of course, the prohibitive cost of some events, but also the fact that young adults find themselves alone in the generally older audience of these activities."

As a cultural program, *Rendez-vous* attempts to solve both problems. It is, first of all, designed for people aged between 18 and 35 years old. And secondly, it offers its public, for a mere $49 , the possibility of attending five cultural events of their choice between September and March. Furthermore, *Rendez-vous* allows the subscribers the opportunity to actually meet the performers, musicians, actors, and dancers of certain shows. Also featured are behind the scene tours and art workshops.

The program presents a diversified agenda, divided into five artistic sectors. These are, theatre, dance, music, museums and film. Theatre fans will be pleased to see, for example, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* or Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. Musicals such as *Company* by Stephen Sondheim or *Jerusalem* by A. Bihary and C. Edwards are available, as are works from French authors as varied as Jean Racine and Albert Camus.

For music lovers, *Rendez-vous* boasts concerts by the Montréal Jubilation Gospel Choir, bluesmen Mighty Joe Young and Big Jack Johnson. Or, for those whose predilections are more inclined towards classical music, there are performances by the Montréal Symphony Orchestra, I Musici, the Société de Musique Contemporaine du Québec.

As for dance, two names stand out in the Modern Dance section: Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal.

Looking for more relaxed activities? Many museums have teamed with *Rendez-Vous* and propose guided tours. The Montréal Museum of Fine Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the McCord Museum, which figure on the program, represent three of the city's finest art milieus open to the public.

Or you can explore the Film section, which offers five screenings, some of which are followed by discussions with experienced film specialists. Over all, that's about 45 different activities from which to choose. A remarkable growth since last year, when *Rendez-vous* was just beginning.

Four hundred people subscribed for the 96-97 season. Cohen expects about 800 this time around. Another notable improvement since last year is the registration method. Instead of choosing only one activity in each of the five categories, subscribers can now pick three in the Performing Arts section (Theatre, Dance, Music) and two in the Visual Arts section (Museums and Films). This ensures a greater cultural diversity in your selected activities.

"The program's main objective," says Cohen, "is to give young adults the habit of culture, and of attending cultural events."

Since *Rendez-vous* gives an outlook at culture in Montréal, it is especially appealing to outsiders, who are not familiar with the city's artistic life. This is reflected in last year's attendance, where almost half of the subscribers were from outside of Montréal.

The increasing popularity of *Rendez-Vous with the World of Art* clearly indicates that it fulfills an important need of today's youth. Due to this growth, Ari Cohen is planning many new exciting features for the following years, including week-end visits to Chicago and New York. So, if you want to enrich your understanding of this city's culture, the best way is to subscribe to this season's program.

Rendez-vous with the World of Art is organized by the Saidye Bronfman Youth Institute, located at 5170, Côte-Ste-Catherine, 739-2301 or www.generation.net/sbyi. The opening night party is Thursday September 11, 21h00 at the Cabaret (Musée Juste pour Rire).

Impersonal, Unsentimental: The Sneaker Pimps

by Alex Halperin

Trip-hoppers wow an eclectic crowd

Could the Sneaker Pimps be the future of music? As the music embarrassingly labeled "electronica" seeps into the mainstream of North American culture, and modern rock staples Smashing Pumpkins, and Nine Inch Nails embrace techno, the Sneaker Pimps quietly bend the sounds of both into music echoing of Bristol England's landmark trip-hop and the stubborn guitar bands of ages past. The band adds to their techno credibility Kelli Dayton, a singer more erotic and innovative than anyone appearing on Summer's over-hyped, overrated Lilith Fair. In a sense, The Sneaker Pimps unite the equally exclusive genres of cynical guitar pop and an exhausted rave culture.

Reflecting the uneasy pairing of rock and techno, the crowd at Sona last Tuesday seemed to wonder whether to dance exuberantly or sit back and chill in 'cooler then thou' rock mode. The rock set dominated the audience as ravers with tank tops and pacifiers squirmed in place as gloomy grunge guys paced uneasily, as if they were at the wrong show. The wishy-washy crowd, equally uncertain of the appropriate drugs for the evening's entertainment, smoked cigars.

The Sneaker Pimps came on to mild applause and opened with a mellow, emotional rendition of the title track on their new album "Becoming X." Looking like a jumble of all the rock and techno subculture, they gleefully adopted the ambiguity, refusing to cater completely to either crowd.

Undoubtedly their greatest strength on stage is singer Kelli Dayton, engaging the audience with passionate unsentimental wails. In the spirit of electronic music's famously impersonal aura she scarcely stopped to address the crowd. But she connected with them nonetheless, perhaps through the melancholy lyrics and her ability to come across as vulnerable despite her obvious and total control.

BY LORI BRAUN
DAILY PHOTO

Even on stage The Sneaker Pimps effectively fused genres with a guitar, bass, drums, a mixer (who Emphasized reverb) and occasionally a (gasp) acoustic guitar. Members of the band other than Dayton appeared completely disinterested in the audience. Although bassist Jef—looking like a cross between the Prodigy's Keith Flynt and Slash—grew excited towards the end and began jumping around the stage, it was to little effect.

Though it never approached frenzy status, audience excitement grew as the 50 minute set progressed. The uninitiated bounced to the pop hit "6 Underground" while ravers recognized a sedated version of the remixed club anthem "Spin Spin Sugar".

After finally drawing greater enthusiasm for the encore of "Low Place Like Home," the Sneaker Pimps half-heartedly ambled off stage. No one seemed too disappointed by the brief set. Even if the fans wanted to party harder or later they knew they had work the next morning.

Events

Thursday September 11, 1997

K.N. Panikkar will be presenting a conference series on the 50th Anniversary of Independence of Pakistan and India - Communalism and its Impact on South Asia at the Strathearn Centre 3680 Jeanne Mance, Room 212, 19h.

Monday September 15, 1997

Come help us paint a new bike lane! **QPIRG and Le Monde a Bicyclette** is organizing this fun event that takes place at Milton and Hutchison at 9h30. For info, call: 273-5537.

Wednesday September 16, 1997

Best Buddies — Be buddies with an adult with a developmental disability or volunteer with organization, publicity or archives. For info call Alven 827-9272 or Naudeep 367-0442. General meeting room B09, 17h30.

Friday September 17

LBGTM - Lesbian Bisexual Gay and Transgender students of McGill is having a Wine and Cheese. Everybody Welcome. UTC basement, 3521 University (near Milton) 18h30 to 20h30. We will be going out en masse afterwards. Discussion group will be starting the week of September 15. For info call 398-6822.

Ongoing

Native Friendship Centre is doing a General Health Survey to identify barriers in Montreal for accessing services. Wants Native McGill students to contact the Centre. Info: Natalie Lloyd, 499-1854, 2001 St. Laurent. Will come to McGill if more convenient.

Montreal Assault Prevention Centre offers a self-defense course in September and October for women called ACTION. The course is appropriate for all ages and physical abilities. The course is taught by a woman and there will be no simulated attacks by a padded aggressor. Info: 284-1212.

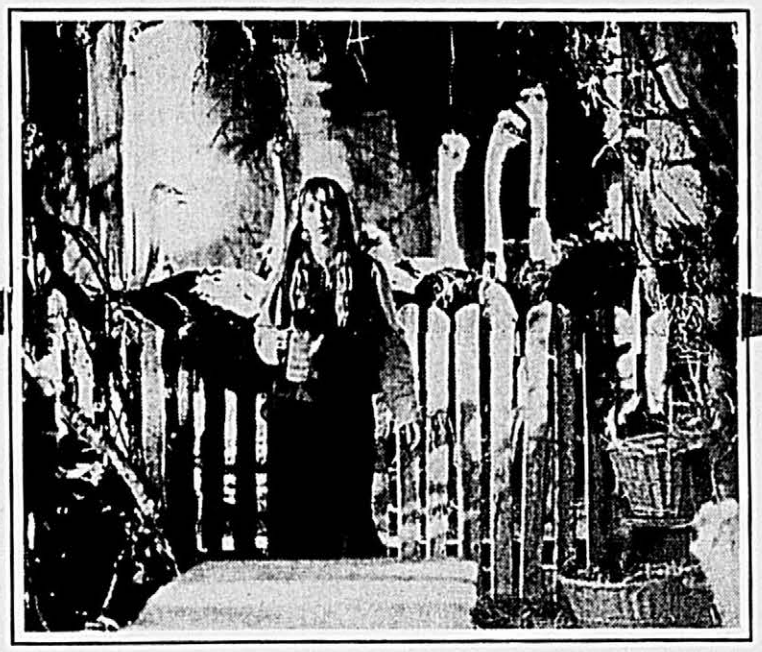
Canadian film cured of its kink phase

Toronto Film Festival features the regeneration of national cinema

BY IRA NAYMAN

Over the last couple of years, Canadian film has created the impression that we are a nation of sexual deviants. The obsessive voyeurism portrayed in Atom Egoyan's *Exotica*, the characters who are aroused by car crashes in David Cronenberg's *Crash*, the romantically presented necrophilia of Lynne Stopkewitch's *Kissed*; all have contributed to a sense of Canada as seething with moral and emotional turmoil. (Not surprisingly, all have received international attention as a result, which is of questionable value since it does not reflect the quality of the films themselves).

However, before Canada began developing a reputation as a nation of sick perverts, our filmmakers were known for specializing in small, less sensational works. These films drew their strength from portraying recognizable relationships and the subtler nuances of character. We seem to be reverting to form. Most of the Canadian films showcased at this year's Toronto International Film Festival eschew facile sensationalism to explore a more realistic emotional landscape with which viewers can more easily identify.



Guy Maddin's *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*, for instance, pursues the director's familiar theme of the cruel futility of love. In the mythical land of Mandragora, a young man (played by an uncredited actor) falls in love with a beautiful, exotic woman (Pascale Bussieres). Unfortunately, she is under the thrall of a (literally) mesmerizing older man (memorably portrayed by R. H. Thomson). The ensuing drama leads, quite inevitably, to a tragic outcome.

Worlds away stylistically, yet sharing the same concern with exploring human behaviour in conflictual circumstances, is *Stowaways*, co-directed by Canadian Denis Chouinard and Swiss Nicolas Wadimoff. The French-language film is about six people who pay to be smuggled into Canada in a crate on a cargo ship; as the trip drags on and their food and water begin to run out, their relationships become increasingly strained. This plotline becomes particularly poignant in light of the current debates surrounding Romany refugees.

Made along comparable lines is Thom Fitzgerald's first feature, *The Hanging Garden*, in which a gay man returns home after a decade's absence to attend his sister's wedding. Ironically, the groom happens to be the man with whom the protagonist shared his first kiss. This stirs up old emotions and rekindles old feuds. Metaphorically, these are represented by a reminisced image of the protagonist's corpulent 15 year-old body hanging from a tree in the garden, a suicide attempt which haunts various members of the family.

The films are all concerned with the interactions of characters under the influence of powerful emotions. Usually, these are portrayed in subtle scenes. An example is the bantering of the ostracized son and his sister in *The Hanging Garden*, where deep emotions always seem to be just below the surface. Or the way some of the characters in *Stowaways* quietly submit to terrible indignities in order to survive. At other times, the emotions run riot all over the screen, especially in *Twilight*; Maddin's sensibility, as always, tends towards the operatic.

However, one shouldn't get the impression that the films are difficult to watch. Admittedly, *Stowaways* starts off seriously and becomes increasingly bleak, but the characters are engaging enough that you come to care deeply about their survival. The other two films are leavened with humour. There is a hilarious scene towards the end of *Twilight*, for example, where the jilted hero melodramatically calls to the trees in the forest around them to take vengeance against his lover and her companion. Of course, the trees don't heed his pitiable call.

The Hanging Garden is most successful at balancing comic and tragic moods. A couple of the characters interact with the imagined body hanging from the tree as if it were actually there with them. This is shown to be hilarious in one scene, while more serious in another, when the body forces the father to confront his conflicting feelings over his son. Often, scenes which start out comic develop more serious overtones as the characters are overwhelmed by their emotions.

In order to engage the audience, character-driven films require strong acting, something each of these films can boast. Chris Leavins' performance as the son in *The Hanging Garden* has great emotional range. He is shown to be outwardly self-confident, but in reality plagued by problems of the past. The supporting cast, including Kerry Fox, Seana McKenna, Peter McNeill and Joan Orenstein, are brilliant at projecting the inner lives of people who are forever tied to their past laments.

At first, the characters in *Stowaways* may seem too stereotypical: the man from the Middle East who wants to retain his cultural identity, the woman from the same region with a contrary attitude, the white supremacist who can't stand either of them etc.... However, the actors in this ensemble piece nuance their performances well; the two child actors, in particular, convey the appropriate confusion and terror of being caught in a strenuous predicament which they are unable or too young to deal with.

The performances in *Twilight* are highly stylized and hence integral to the film's general framework. R. H. Thomson, for example, delivers his lines as if he were a computer voice synthesizer; the character in turn is both mysterious and beguiling. Frank Gorshin is a little over the top as a crusty old ostrich farm worker, but again, in the context of the film, the performance is well suited and entertaining. Most importantly, the lead performers carry *Twilight*'s dramatic weight.

Twilight of the Ice Nymphs and *The Hanging Garden* are scheduled for a fall release; at press time, there was no word on when or where *Stowaways* will be released. One thing is certain, though: if your taste runs towards Canadian kink, don't look for it at the cinema this year.

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mr. bill, a peach and i

by zev tiefenbach

"dear mr. peach tell us where you're from:"

bill bissett and i are eating peaches on the patio of a café. across the street, an enormous condominium lurks stoic upon the changing landscape of the sky.

"dear mr. peach. tell us where you're from:"

and in the improbable event that you do respond, perhaps you'll tell us of other improbabilities. tell us mr. peach, do you like to dance? does it come naturally to you; letting go and being? how do you like your stand in the city? your view of the condominium, does it make you sad? does it make you yearn for your field in ontario; your patch of land and your branch?

for us there are days when we just don't leave the house. when outside scares us. days when the jittered stance of social disease makes the screen go red and really, you know that it can't be safe to leave the house. especially not if you have "lung things or throat things or brain things."

but it was all o.k. for bill and i that day.

"do you know what i wish?" says bill. "i wish that in school, when we were little they would tell us that the tableau wasn't really real."

"the tableau?" i ask.

"the tableau of marriage and happily-ever-after and you know all those things. not to depress the children but in a nice way tell us so we can know a little earlier than we find out."

for mr. bill it's about celebration. life as a celebration. celebrating big people and little people as miracles of some unknown gift. in school, the big perfect people try not to disappoint us, and maybe if they could be taught that they also need to learn, then we'd all realize that little people don't need to grow up to fulfill the expectations of bigger people.

"we're wonderful and they're wonderful and everyone's all wonderful. i think grade three would be late for introducing the topic."

bill likes to dance. he likes the idea of dance as a metaphor, which encompasses his life. dance is about fluidity, about an instinctual bodily movement that simultaneously expresses and is.in a certain way, meeting bill is like reading his poetry. he exposes himself; however goofy, however nonsensical without pretense. he is open to the vast unpredictable being that is himself, and he is committed to living as that being. his public readings are raw and intense. he respects his audience and attempts to give them, not an archaic anthologized vision but rather, the energy and the life of his moments. sometimes, in chant, he abandons words and gives the audience sound instead.:

". . . when it's like only the sound actually it can be more innovative, it can be more meaningfully implicating however so meaningfully implicating that it's an adoration of meaninglessness and so it's very cool. sometimes i can get lost in those which is great because sometimes when we get lost we're fine."

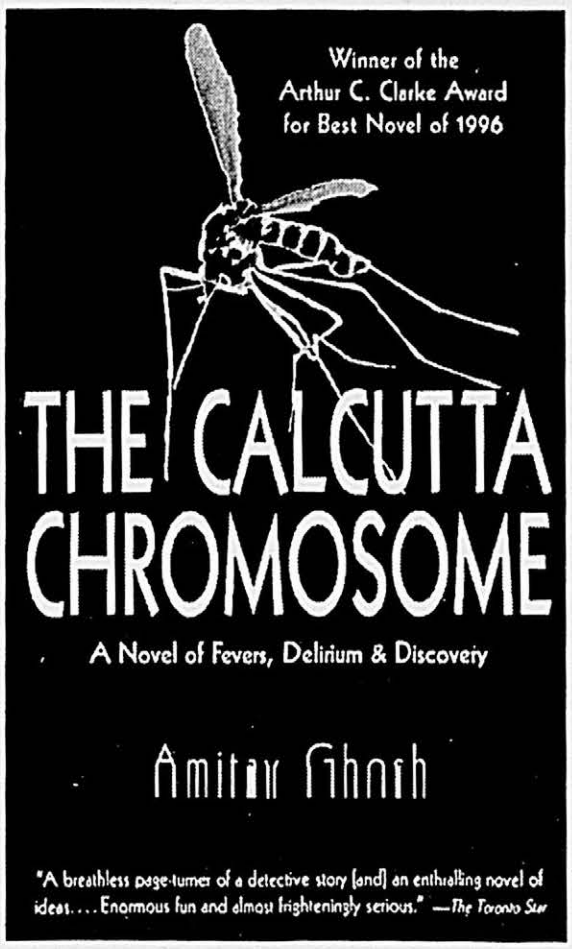
bill's childhood dream was to be a ballet dancer or a figure skater. however, when he was ten or eleven he fell sick and required intensive surgery on his abdomen. the doctors told him that he would never play hockey again. he never saw much of a career for himself in hockey, but had to reconsider his commitment to artistic movement. there, in the oxygen tent, he decided that if he could not dance he would instead let his "words dance on paper".

and on paper, his words do dance. his fusion poems lyrically intertwine a political sphere with a sincere personal narrative. one senses, while reading bill's work that his hand is always close to the paper. his anthologies are speckled with pen illustrations and his writing, devoid of punctuation and capital letters, relies on it's own internal sound. in this way, he writes with a deliberate grace; creating space with the movement of his words. this space creates a depth on the page that gives life to both the simple and complex acts of living. all the while, dancing bill remains mostly oblivious to the ripples evoked from his movement and in humility dances on and on.

bill's approach to life does not insulate him from pain. he is vulnerable to the waves of his emotions, though in reflection he celebrates this manifestation of randomness. he tells me of his mother who "passed to spirit" after a lengthy battle with cancer when he was 14. one senses the turbulence and tragedy of his adolescence and throughout his life sadness and pain seem to shadow

Fevers, Delirium and Obscurity

by PaulReeve



Silence, as those of the hidden and the enigmatic, can sometimes hold both great meaning and great power. This truth is recognized by Amitav Ghosh's writer-character Phulboni: "Mistaken are those who imagine that silence is without life...It is not: indeed the Word is to the silence what the shadow is to the foreshadowed, what the veil is to the eyes, what the mind is to truth, what language is to life." The understanding of this truth animates Ghosh's latest novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Secrecy and careful mystery lie at the heart of the forces at work in the book's story. They also penetrate to the core of its underlying subject matter; Ghosh's own ideas about personal identity.

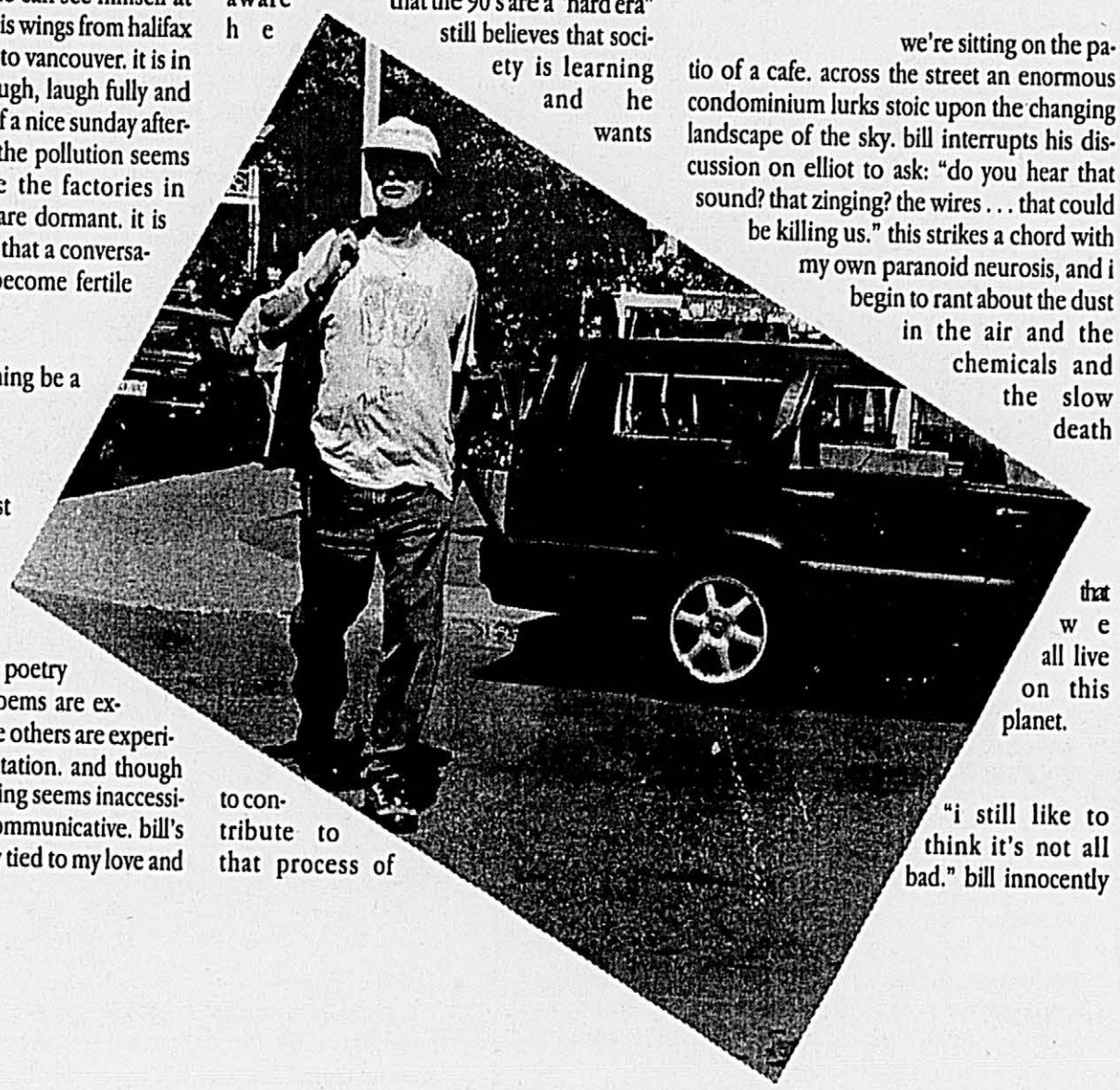
The story is multi-layered: it begins sometime in the near future with a desk-bound New York City computer operator, Antar, overseeing the cataloguing work of his disconcertingly human computer, Ava. The discovery of a long-abandoned I.D. card leads him to delve into the life and work of an eccentric colleague, L. Murugan, whose obsessive interest in the history of malaria researcher Ronald Ross took him in 1995 to Calcutta, India, where he disappeared. Murugan and Ava then return us, through separate historical narrations, to late nineteenth-century India, where Ross's breakthrough research on malaria originally took place.

Ghosh weaves together the disparate narrative threads with clean, economical prose. The action, spread out in time and space, holds together remarkably well. Antar, however, often seems to have little to do but sit back and watch as his improbably sophisticated computer reaches out across the globe, retrieving and reconstructing everything he needs, including a years-old email still floating about conveniently "in the ionosphere".

The story's tension builds around the work of the pugnacious Murugan, who proclaims himself the world's greatest expert on the malaria research of Ronald Ross, the British researcher who won the Nobel prize for uncovering the mechanism by which malaria is transmitted by mosquitoes. Murugan is convinced that Ross, who was a neophyte researcher, could not possibly have made the discovery alone: rather, Murugan believes, he must have been unknowingly guided by a mysterious native group whose principles are grounded, perversely, in a sort of "counter-science", and for whom silence and secrecy are both sacred and essential. He sees in the story of Ross' discoveries the workings of a guiding hand, pushing Ross toward information missed by his more distinguished colleagues around the world.

Murugan's theories take him on a journey to Calcutta, where he encounters and becomes entwined with the lives of a jour-

an interview with bill bissett



him. but it is at least in part through his writing that he heals. his abandonment to creativity gives him space to celebrate the expanse of wonder from where he can see himself at the age of 16 spreading his wings from halifax and thumbing the roads to vancouver. it is in this space that he can laugh, laugh fully and completely at the irony of a nice sunday afternoon in toronto where the pollution seems bearable only because the factories in pittsburg and hamilton are dormant. it is in this womb of creation that a conversation with a peach can become fertile grounds for poetry..

"can anything be a poem?" i ask.

"yes, stupid things i did last week would be excellent. that would be a list poem wouldn't it?"

the subject of bill's poetry is vast in range. some poems are explorations of sound, while others are experiments of visual representation. and though at times bill's cryptic writing seems inaccessible, his desire is to be communicative. bill's political writing is "totally tied to my love and care of the world and impatience with the hierarchical structures." he brings optimism to the present and though he is acutely aware that the 90's are a "hard era" he still believes that society is learning and he wants to contribute to that process of growth. he is not content to accept the cynical archetypes of the age and gropes instead for obscure hope.

we're sitting on the patio of a cafe. across the street an enormous condominium lurks stoic upon the changing landscape of the sky. bill interrupts his discussion on elliot to ask: "do you hear that sound? that zinging? the wires . . . that could be killing us." this strikes a chord with my own paranoid neurosis, and i begin to rant about the dust in the air and the chemicals and the slow death that we all live on this planet.

"i still like to think it's not all bad." bill innocently interjects. "that it could be healthy."

"it could be healthy? what could it be healthy for? right, it helps the cars..."

"it helps us communicate, and it helps get us less isolated from each other, and less cultural superstitions about the other and all this stuff and that we're all in it together and that we're not all the same and yet we're all sharing the same geography and it's wonderful."

although bill doesn't generate enough income with his writing alone to subsist, he has become one of canada's most recognized poets. this kind of pseudo fame has not lead him to galvanize or insulate his work. he does not presume that what he will write will bear a mark upon the canadian cultural identity. he attributes his success to "luck and sticking to it", and one can be sure that bill will write on; not to reach ever closer to glorified success, but because without writing, bill's life would be so remarkably different. bill has let go of so many of the tangible truths that ground people to identity and has instead leaped and soared into the vast, and mostly uncharted, universe of himself and others. "my head can fly off, i can loose my physicality, but the tactility of text grounds me to being."

Book Review: *The Calcutta Chromosome*

nalist and an actress. Their individual misadventures join in a series of increasingly suspicious coincidences, and lead Murugan's search onward.

This book's strengths lie in the telling of its story. Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century India are vibrant and alive in its pages. Ghosh's characters are idiosyncratic and human. The development of the three historical narratives is effectively coordinated to develop suspense and curiosity.

On the other hand, the story's weaknesses emerge most clearly in the its resolution. I'm not going to give away the ending; suffice it to say that it failed either to convince or to interest me. The conclusion is the culmination of the bizarre events which precede Murugan's disappearance and which reemerge with the discovery of his I.D.

There is nothing wrong with using the fantastic to illustrate and clarify ideas about the everyday and the actual, and hinging the mystery of a story on an inquiry into scientific history can be a good way to stir interest. But there is something irritating about building up interest around a scientific question, and then simply allowing its vague release through the obscure and the mystical. Murugan's enigmatic practitioners of "counter-science" play a role in each of the book's parallel stories, but their role is only clarified far enough to allow them to simply absorb and redirect the characters and the conclusion.

Their dark bloodletting rituals, glimpsed around corners and in badly lit rooms at night, seem characteristic of a cult. At various points in the novel, they seem to demonstrate shockingly far-reaching powers. Also, they are apparently possessed of incredible insights into the workings of malaria simply because of their position outside the dominant paradigms of western science. Frustratingly, these mysteries are left basically unsolved, and if anything are only deepened as the book concludes.

Murugan believes that the research they are secretly directing is tied to a different sort of biological information, which he has dubbed the Calcutta chromosome, connected to the determination, and even the transference, of personal characteristics—"the symptomology of the self". The Calcutta chromosome is a theoretical carrier of genetic code determining (or being determined by) personal characteristics, residing in the brain, which can be transferred from person to person. Shrouded in the mystery that surrounds the group who are custodians of this secret, this supposedly scientific idea seems to act as a repository for the more ambiguous questions about personal identity that are faced in the book. Instead, it looks like a cop-out: a simple pseudo-scientific mask for a set of complex issues.

The Calcutta Chromosome is billed both as a scientific thriller and as a meditation on personal identity. In the former role, it is a failure. Inventive though it is, its science acts as little more than an elaborate hook on which to hang the mystical and symbolic matter at its core. In the latter, it is somewhat more successful, cleverly playing out the ambiguities that surround the question of the self. It successfully avoids the trap of blasé conventionality into which so many mysteries fall, but in doing so, it runs into its own problems with obscurity. Maybe this is a necessary trade-off, demanded by the complexity and ambiguity of the fundamental subject matter. I'm just not sure that the other, perhaps more mundane, side got a fair exchange.

The Calcutta Chromosome is a worthwhile read, if only for the artistry of Ghosh's story-telling and his mastery of setting, but the reader may find herself more than a little disoriented at its finish.

The Calcutta Chromosome, *by Amitav Ghosh, is published by Vintage Canada.*

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Instructor: Bart Beaty Graduate Program in Communications
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Discussion Group: Fridays, 9:30am - other optional times to be announced, 3465 Peel Street, room 202 or 203

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Not a political soundtrack

Arborhythms offers music and support for Montréal's green space

by Yohei Igarashi

Musicians and politics have often gone hand in hand. A case in point would be the recently founded Tibetan Freedom Concerts organized by Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys. For many artists, music allows an artist the freedom to not only to express emotions but also political thought.

However, though the music event Arborhythms is a fundraiser for the Morgan Arboretum and is in support of environmental awareness, both organizers and musicians do not see the event as purely political. According to Arborhythms coordinator Doug Miller, the fundraiser supports an issue which should not be segregated into factions of different beliefs, but more an issue which demands a constant attention, and which transcends politics.

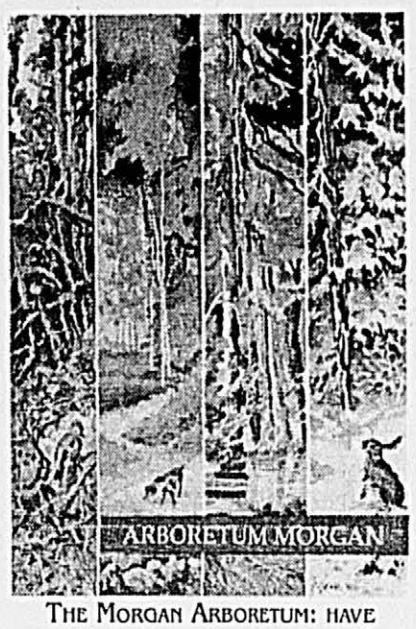
"Whether you're right or left or whatever, you still gotta live here," says Miller.

An arboretum is best defined in layman's terms; it is a botanical garden of trees. Hundreds of different species of trees are planted and researched. Donated to McGill's Macdonald College and it's forestry department by the Morgan family, The Morgan Arboretum will host the first Arborhythms this Sunday.

The event itself was spurred by the annually successful Earthweek, which was founded by the two organizers of Arborythms, Miller and Ryan Young. Famous country/rock star Jeff Smallwood will be headlining the show while the event offers an array of other musical guests including the jazz fusion band Circus.

For Smallwood, the event encompasses not only environmental issues, but also a feeling of sentimentality.

"Personally, if I could draw attention to it...fine," says Smallwood. "Provided that I'm drawing attention to the cause, and not some piece of music I wrote in allegiance to the cause. I could only get into something I believe in. I mean I'm a professional entertainer, but I just like the place. I grew up there. I live near it."



THE MORGAN ARBORETUM: HAVE YOU KISSED YOUR TREE TODAY?

"That was the only woods we had," he continues. "We used to do everything in those woods. As kids we slayed dragons there."

However, although he supports the fundraiser, Smallwood is not interested in politically proselytizing anyone.

"I think music is always the soundtrack to any political rally," says Smallwood. "But I'm a professional entertainer. The magic I deliver is from my guitar. I've refused to play in all political causes and stuff like that. Some have been straight down my political leaning and others have been completely against. I refused all of them. I'm not sure about getting people to vote for something because I do."

For many other artists like Smallwood, the Morgan Arboretum has been a place of sanctuary and comfort as it provides one of the largest green spaces in Montréal. Drummer for Circus Jason Grey was also raised in St. Anne Bellevue, and holds similar views as Smallwood with regards to the Aborhythms.

"I'm happy with the cause," comments Grey. "I still go there [the Morgan Arboretum], you know because I live in St. Anne Bellevue. It's more of a home-town thing. We [the musical guests] are part of the community. I mean, I cross country ski there in the winter. I think it's great that we have access to this greenspace."

Unfortunately, Aborhythms has not received a widespread support from larger environmental groups. As Ryan Young explains, environmental groups seem also to be caught up in the money aspect of a cause, rather than the cause itself.

"For a lot of environmental groups Arborythms wasn't big enough for them," says Young. "They didn't help us at all. No representatives, no T-shirts, no speakers. Tom Watson (the head of the Sea Shepards which organized Earthweek) addressed this issue when he spoke at Concordia."

"The Morgan Arboretum is a non-profit organization," continues Young. "And the money from the fundraiser is mainly going to education for running programs for children. Some of the money will go to the up-keep of the facilities and to miscellaneous things like birdfeeders."

Other artists on the bill include coordinator Doug Miller, who will be playing with his country/folk band Deep Trouble, the Indigo-Girls-esque duo Pigeon Hole, and Michael MacDonald, an active member of the West Island music scene.

Arborythms is unlike the commonplace music festival of modern years. The carefully put together line-up of local bands all have personal attachment to the Morgan Arboretum. For the artists, Aborhythms is somewhat of a means whereby they are paying homage to their hometown, and, in a sense, lending a helping hand to the woods that used to be their backyard.

Tickets: one ticket $10, two tickets: $16. Student prices: one ticket $5, two tickets $8.Tickets can be purchased at the following places:

The Morgan Arboretum: St. Anne Bellevue

Wildlifers: Plaza Baie D'urfe - 90 Morgan Road

Norway Nordic: 127 rue St. Anne de Bellevue

Doug Anakin Sport: 454 Beaconsfield Blvd, Beaconsfield. For Information call: 398-7812

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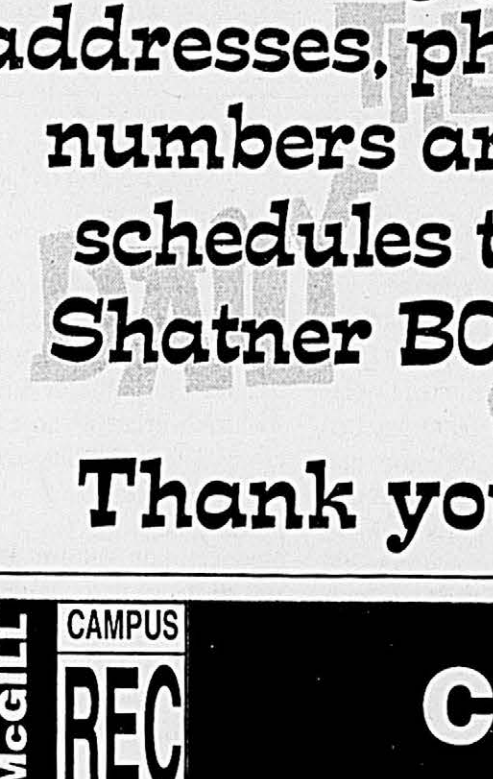

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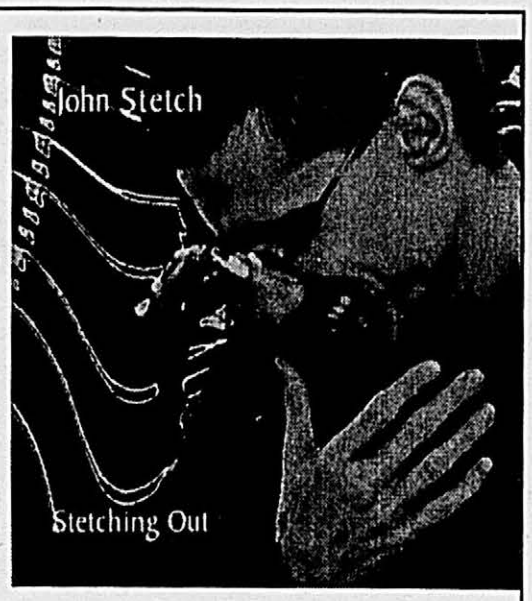

Being a pianist in a jazz trio is a lot like being a guitarist in a rock band. You're following in the footsteps of thousands of others that have played your instrument and most probably will find it very difficult to reach out and explore new musical ground. One major difference between rock guitarists and jazz pianists is that, as the old Kids in The Hall joke goes, guitarists always date pretty girls, whereas pianists date the pretty girls' best friends. All ranting aside, Stetch's new album is a more subdued, somber album than his last Carpathian Blues. Stetching Out isn't as experimental or daring as some of Stetch's previous work which probably reflects his revived interest in classical music. While this new work by Stetch is both interesting and at times dissonant, it does not compare to his earlier work in terms of rhythmic dynamism or tonal range. "For All We Know" is probably the best cut on the album, as it is most reminiscent of Stetch's earlier work. Stetch plays with the relationship between drums and piano with the two instruments exchanging musical 'licks' in an unconventional dissonant manner. Although I don't like this album as much as some of Stetch's previous work, Stetch still manages to shine in his piano work on the album. In his defense, mixing jazz and classical is a very difficult thing to do effectively. Classical music doesn't 'swing', whereas jazz, by definition, does. Stetch tries concertedly to accommodate the two. As for dating the pretty girl's best friend, you're going to have to ask Stetch in person whether that's true or not.

John Stetch plays at the Upstairs Bar on Friday night at 10:00 pm Tickets available at the door.

-Gil Shochat

Various Artists
What's Up Matador
(Matador Records OLE 163)

This new double CD (priced as a single) compilation from the venerable New York based, semi-indie label Matador Records features one disc of previously released greatest hits style, titled *Favorite Tracks*, and one disc of rare *Unreleased Tracks*. Featuring an excellent roster of bands ranging from the hardcore of Unsane to the exotica of the Pizzicato 5 to the poppier sounds of Teenage Fanclub and Bettie Serveert, disc one is remarkably consistent and listenable. I enjoyed virtually all the tracks, even ones from acts that I am not normally enamored with. In particular, the offerings from Pavement, Superchunk, Yo La Tengo, Spoon, Cat Power, Liz Phair and Chavez are my favorites. Even though I already own a number of Matador releases, and am rather familiar with the label, this is a great compilation of what Matador has to offer.

In addition, the second disc offers something new for die-hard fans who already own much of the material on the first disc. Although not nearly as consistent as the first CD, these tracks are interesting for fans who own all of the official release by a particular band, but not really of much value to the casual listener. Many of these songs, not even used as B-sides, are below the usual quality of these artists, but some, like Chavez's "Theme From 'For Russ'", Yo La Tengo's "Don't Say a Word (Demo Version)", and the Pizzicato Five's "Happy Birthday" are interesting insights into the bands' creative processes or experiments that wouldn't fly on a regular release. Worth owning for both dedicated fans and those new to indie-rock, both discs of What's Up Matador accomplish what they set out to with the diversity and quality that has come to be expected from Matador.

—Ben Hardy

Luna
Pup Tent
(Elektra / Warner)

Like an ex-child actor who has made an unsuccessful switch to grown-up roles, Luna leader Dean Wareham remains haunted by past glories. Rykodisc recently reissued the entire Galaxie 500 oeuvre and the effect is revealing: in comparison. Luna's more textured, more polished, more *sophisticated* sound holds no candle to his former band's ragged lullaby simplicity.

To brand Luna as "unsuccessful" is perhaps unfair; through four albums the band has recorded some genuinely affecting music ("Sideshow by the Seashore," "California All The Way," "Bonnie & Clyde"). But Luna's understated, whispery style of guitar rock has always walked the tightrope between subversion and convention, and the new album, *Pup Tent*, falls into the latter category.

Picking up from the instrumental eclecticism of 1995's *Penthouse*, *Pup Tent* adds sprinkles of trumpet, mandolin, accordion and "bits and bobs," along with vibes, cello and marimba, to the four major food groups (voice, guitar, bass, drums). And Wareham's lyrical style - a half-sincere, tangential playfulness - remains inspired, accompanied intuitively by guitarist Sean Eden's assured if casual riffs. But the songs - and the album - fail to make an impression beyond a hazy recollection.

Granted, this is Luna's modus operandi: lulling you into unconsciousness and then, when you are sufficiently subdued, dispatching you with an unshakeable hook. Luna have succeeded in the past — but they don't on *Pup Tent*. And, I admit, the thought nags: Galaxie 500 did so much more with so much less.

— Kevin Siu

Luna plays the Cabaret on Monday, September 15.

Pizzicato Five
Happy End of the World
(Matador / Capitol)

I resolve to avoid the following terms in describing Pizzicato Five: kitsch, retro-futurism, space age bachelor pad, Audrey Hepburn, Bacharach. In fact, it's not even necessary. Although telling remnants remain of Pizzicato Five's widely reported affinity for '60s American pop culture and all things pop, the Japanese duo's latest album (and its first American release with all-new material), *Happy End of the World*, is a current affair.

CD REVIEWS

Fulfilling the promise of earlier albums to use technology for good instead of evil, *Happy End of the World* places electronica or techno or whatever in a pop context without the result sounding tacky — or at least unintentionally tacky. The press release claims that the album will dispel any notions of Pizzicato Five as "mere cultural recyclers." Actually, unless approached with the intent to amuse, the CD will likely repel some genre isolationists. What the album does dispel is the notion that "innovation" and "lots of catchy" are mutually exclusive.

This is an album to swoon to. When bossa nova meets breakbeat, when hi-fi meets Motown, when the drum 'n' bass geek takes the cheerleader out to see some European cinema... this is the fusion we've always wanted but were afraid to request.

This is thoroughly modern, Millie.

— Kevin Siu

Pizzicato Five plays the Cabaret on Tuesday, September 16.

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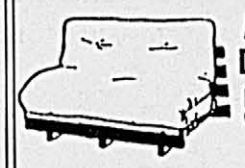

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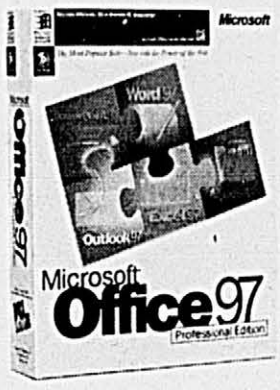

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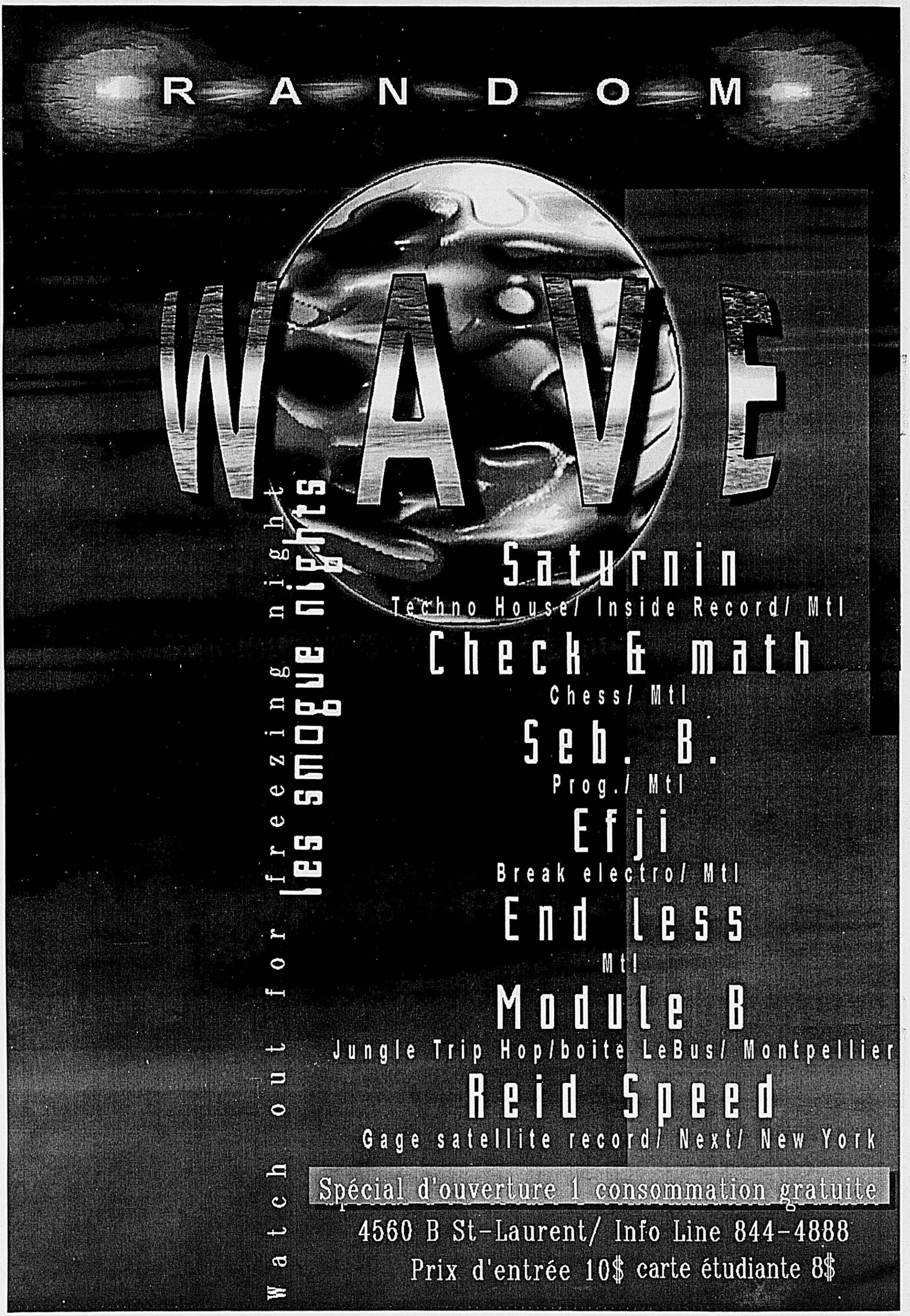
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